

History of the Holy Week Traditions in the Ricote Valley. Blanca



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- (c) Ángel Ríos Martínez & Govert Westerveld
Academia de Estudios Humanísticos de Blanca**

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all foreign visitors.

Preface

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. It has a significant role in development of the economy in Spain and its villages. Consequently there are significant linkages with sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, construction, transport, etc.

Blanca has many things to offer to anyone wishing to enjoy this small village of the famous Ricote Valley. It is a beautiful place to walk around and observe the natural beauty of its landscape. Blanca offers the traveller a chance to enjoy an adventurous type of tourism which includes a descent of the River Segura, hiking, and pony trekking among other activities. Another attraction is the Holy Week of Blanca, a tradition that exists since the XVI century in Blanca.

Despite having so much potential for tourism Blanca's share of international arrivals is still insignificant. To overcome this problem there is a real need of communication between the village and foreign visitors. That is the reason for this English book which tells you about the Brotherhoods of the Holy Week - to discover the ancient secrets of this small village.

The Authors

Content:

Preface of the authors	V
01. Catholic Fraternities	01
02. Places of worship in Blanca	20
03. Patronages of Blanca	59
04. Brotherhood of the Holy Souls of Blanca	71
05. The Holy Week	75
06. Brotherhoods in Blanca	87
07. Bibliography	125

CHAPTER 1

Catholic Fraternities

The Catholic fraternities are those in which believers gather around an invocation of Christ, the Virgin, or a saint, a moment of passion or a relic, with pious, religious, or welfare purposes. Thus one could speak of sacramental, Christological, Marian, saints, souls, mixed or passionate brotherhoods. But in general and apart from the provisions of the law, three types of fraternities are traditionally allowed:

- *Penitential* ones, which make public penitence at Easter. Jesus Luengo reserves the term fraternity for penitential fraternities.⁴
- *Sacramental* ones, which grow as a basic goal, devotion, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.
- *Glory* ones, which is what the fraternities that do not fit into any of the two previous segments are called in some places; normally they encourage a cult of some Marian devotion or some saint.

Many fraternities usually organize a procession at least once a year either alone or with other ones.

The plenary organ of the fraternity is the council or general assembly of all the members. The general council is responsible for choosing the *Officers* or *Government Meeting* - the permanent governing organ of the fraternity led by its President, Hermano Mayor or Padre Mayor.

Some dioceses have a superior organ that brings together the diocesan or municipal fraternities and cofraternities and takes different names depending on the location: General Council, Council of Brotherhoods (Supreme council), Federation, Association, Union, Local Meeting, etc.

According to the ordinary law in the same fraternity there may be different types of members with diverse participation, different obligations and privileges.

In principle any Christian can be part of a fraternity on getting a member's endorsement. New members perform an act of admission which is called *Jura de Regla* in which the neophyte prints one kiss in

the *Rulebook* and the Gospel - an act that renews, maintains, and swears his Christian condition and, of course, promises loyalty and service to the fraternity.

Fraternity Structure

Its most developed structure has:

- An *Elder Brother*, President of the fraternity, supreme over the entity to which he is elected on election
- A *Deputy Elder Brother* (Teniente de Hermano Mayor) to stand in for the Eldest Brother if necessary
- One, two, or even three *Butlers* (Mayordomos) who manage the economy of the fraternity
- One or two *Counsellors* or *Prosecutors* who enforce the rules of the fraternity
- One or two *Secretaries* responsible for writing the minutes of councils and official statements on behalf of Hermano Mayor
- One or two *Priostes* in charge of assembling, disassembling, and every aspect of decoration, pictures, and platforms. To dress the images they sometimes appoint *Waiters* who dress the cristíferas sculptures and *Waitresses* who dress the Marian effigies.
- Several *Deputies* among whom are
 - the *Government Deputy Chief* responsible for monitoring the fraternity in all external worship
 - the *Youth and Public Relations Deputy* - head of the youth group and its activities and negotiations with other fraternities
 - the *Charity Deputy* who encourages and carries out all the charitable activities of the fraternity
 - *Religious Affairs Deputy* responsible for carrying out internal cults and sometimes in charge of the group of the fraternity acolytes.

- A *Churchwarden* (whose job is to open and close the fraternity headquarters, and to care for and watch the building when it is proper to the fraternity). This position is usually paid.
- The remaining Brothers are able to vote and speak in the meetings. The hermanos participate in internal cults as believers and can participate in external cults as Nazarenes, acolytes, bearers, or in fraternities with their own bands as musicians.

Procession of the Fraternity of White Penitents of Avignon, by Pierre Grivolas.

All positions are periodically renewed, usually every four years, with the possibility of extension if the Governing Meeting and the Hermanos approve.

- *Brother of honour* was an individual who without formally belonging to the fraternity deserved this distinction
- *Eldest brother of honour* is the life-long post that an old *Elder Brother* or other person received in consideration of the services provided.

If any of its members belongs to the ruling dynasty, the title *Real* appears in his full name (which appears in the corporate shield), while the union of fraternities under the same invocation or oldest congregation can be entitled as *Archbrotherhood*.

The management of the fraternity is governed collegially by councils which - according to the number of people called up - are graded in *General* (when all the brothers attend) and *Officers* (Reserved for the Government Board). By the regularity of their cadence one should distinguish between ordinary assembly (usually held once or twice a year) and the extraordinary ones (in any number, provided that circumstances require so). Spiritual authorities imposed the adoption of some statutes that regulated their internal life, endorsing or correcting ordinances drafted by their deans and approved by the general council. This document is called "rules and regulations", better known as the Rules.

The identity of the fraternity reaffirms itself on the day of the feast of their patron saint and especially during the processions of Corpus Christi, Easter or Rogation. Such public displays of fervor are made following the usual timetable using:

- *Penitent* or *Nazarene*, the brother who at Easter does the procession coated with the penitential habit and the face normally covered with the mask.
- *Acolyte*, the laity who practice the aforementioned function in the procession, clad liturgically and fulfilling its own functions such as bringing cirial or incense. It can be a volunteering brother or an external person hired by the fraternity.
- *Load Brothers* (Hermanos de carga) who carry the bier on the back of their necks (bearers) or shoulders. They may be brothers or people hired by the fraternity.
- *Musician*, the person who accompanies the step with the band, which could be bugles and drums, musical group, or music band (Philharmonic). Normally these bands are hired by the fraternity, although in some parts of Spain it is the fraternities themselves form bands of bugles among their brothers.

Their incomes depend mainly on fees paid by the brothers. Their level of expenditure depends on the devotional, welfare, and liturgical dimensions.

History

Originally the fraternities were invocations with trade or institutional purposes that grouped professional sectors.⁵ For example, in medieval Europe the exploitation, legislation, and regulation of the theater plays depended on the fraternity (or fraternities) created by kings or bishops. Among the most popular and important there were: «Cofrères de la Passion» in Paris; "Disciplinados de Jesucristo" in Umbria, "disciplinados de Santo Domingo" in Perusia, the Brotherhood or

Brotherhoods of Flemish painters, and those of the Spanish theatrical Passion and Solitude. The "Esclavos del Santísimo Sacramento" fraternity in Madrid from the seventeenth century can also be cited of which the brothers were the most unique poets, playwrights, and writers of the Golden Age.

The three fraternities in Blanca before the expulsion in 1613

Overall the fraternities provided great social, charitable, or religious services and in many cases were a guarantee to live and die with dignity. It is true that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the church used the fraternities to introduce its ideals in order to exert strict control over public life for residents, but being a member also had many advantages. It was a safe institution for assisted disease, a comfortable death, a dignified burial, and a vote for the afterlife. Divine worship and social projects were the main objectives of these institutions that survived all political changes until today. The fraternities built chapels or shrines dedicated to their patron saints. They took care of the ill and kept the widows and orphans in need of their fellow associates. The fraternities participated in religious ceremonies and gave Christian burial to their deceased members. Normally fraternities appear under outcropping masters which reserved stewardships and other management positions. They also directed theaters, schools, hospitals, pilgrim hostels; they kept grain bins, chests of mercy, and foundling homes; created folklore, dignified and beautiful customs and traditions; and even organized bullfights to finance hospitals for pilgrims and the poor.

In 1612 there were fraternities in Blanca according to the report by friar Pareda. It is very likely that there were three fraternities, since different wills refer to the Blessed Sacrament, Virgin of the Rosary, and Blessed Anne. We see similarity between the fraternities of Abarán and Blanca and there is no doubt that this is due to the great evangelical work made by Cosme Juan de Durán from Abarán, native of Valencia, who stayed in Blanca for two years between 1576 and 1578. We have searched for evidence about this and found the will of

Abellán de Vega, a Morisco who also lived part of his life in Abarán. The Moriscos of Abarán were devout Catholics and it is not surprising that Abellán de Vega participated in their religious ceremonies. Perhaps that is why in his will from 1586 he mentions giving alms to the Brotherhood of Saint Anne and order 2 ducats to the Blessed Sacrament of this village. Martin de Molina, who was married to Maria Vazquez, also instructed in his will from 1586 to give alms for the wax of the Brotherhood of Saint Anne. The coincidence of a natural disaster (fires, flood, earthquakes, drought, lightnings, and plagues) with certain holy days was a very clear signal for the people that they were not paying proper devotion to the saint whose feast day was commemorated. Years later in 1649 we found two more fraternities in Blanca.

The Brotherhood of the Blessed Sacrament

According to the 1536 report of the visitors of the Order of Santiago to Blanca the silver box of the church for the Blessed Sacrament was given by the visitor of the Church of the Blessed Sacrament from Torrijos which was instituted by Mrs. Teresa Enriquez, lady of the town¹²². Born around 1450 she was married to Mr. Gutierrez Cardenas and belonged to the most illustrious families of Castile, as she was related to King Ferdinand; to Don Fadrique, Master of Santiago, and therefore with King Alfonso XI. Archbishop Juan de Ribera was her relative. They called her "the crazy for the Blessed Sacrament", because she searched for the best grapes of the region to make wine for the Mass, chose the best wheat for the hosts, and tried to make everyone excited for the Eucharist. Her life was characterized by her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and her craziness was to order the construction of the Gothic-Renaissance collegiate, which is currently the main jewel of the monuments in Torrijos. This Collegiate Church of the Blessed Sacrament is also the parish church that was built in the sixteenth century. She died in Torrijos in 1529. The first news of the fraternity in honor of the Blessed Sacrament in Blanca dates from 1585.



**Image of the Lady of the Blessed Sacrament
(from another Spanish city)**

The brotherhood of the Virgin of the Rosary:

Allegedly the first appearance in which the Virgin Mother with her child offers and teaches devotion for the Rosary took place in Fangeaux, France and the revelation was made to Santo Domingo, founder of the Order of Preachers, or Dominicans, a religious order approved by Pope Honorius III on January 21 1217. St. Domingo de Guzmán was born in Caleruega (Spain) in 1170 and died in Bologna in 1221. Some years later he was canonized by Pope Gregory IX in 1234. The celebration of the Virgin of the Rosary or Virgin Our Lady of the Rosary was instituted within the Christian liturgy by the Dominican Pope Pius V in 1572. His successor Gregory XIII extends the Feast of the Rosary on 1 April 1593 to all the churches and chapels in which the Brotherhood was erected.

This festival originated in the religious celebration of the naval victory of Lepanto Christian forces against the Turkish forces on the first Sunday of October 1571 while the Dominican Pope St. Pius V led the destinies of the Catholic Church. This victory was attributed to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary who was invoked throughout the Catholic world with the prayer of the Rosary.

But the prayer of the Rosary had helped the Catholics for about eight years to banish vices and the scourge of wars and plagues through the intercession of the Mother of God and the Church.

At the time of Pope Pius V (1566 - 1572) the Muslims controlled the Mediterranean Sea and prepared the invasion of Christian Europe. The Catholic kings of Europe were divided and seemed unaware of the impending danger. The Pope called for help but they did not pay much attention to him.

On October 7, 1571 fleets of Muslims and Christians fought in the Gulf of Corinth near the Greek town of Lepanto. The Christian fleet composed of soldiers of the Papal States of Venice, Genoa, and Spain commanded by Mr. Juan de Austria entered into battle against an

enemy far superior in size. It was an all-or-nothing battle and before the attack the Christian troops prayed the rosary with devotion. The Battle of Lepanto lasted late into the evening, but the Christians were victorious. The Turks were defeated, most of their ships were sunk, and a storm completed the Turks' destruction. The power of the Turks on the sea had dissolved forever.



The battle of Lepanto
Painting of Letter

In Rome the Pope was praying the rosary while the miraculous Christian victory was achieved. Then he left his chapel, put his head out of the window, looked to the sky and guided by an inspiration calmly announced that the Blessed Virgin had granted the victory, and told his Cardinals:

"Let us dedicate ourselves to give thanks to God and the Blessed Virgin, because we got the win." Weeks later from the distant Gulf of Corinth came the message of Mr. Juan's victory, who from the beginning attributed the success of his fleet to the powerful intercession of Our Lady of the Rosary. Pope Pius V congratulated the winners saying: "It was not the troops. Nor the weapons. It was not the bosses. It was the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it was the Mother of God who got the victory for praying the Rosary. "

In 1572, grateful to our Mother, Pope Pius V instituted the feast of Our Lady of Victories on October 7 and added the title "Helper of Christians" to the Litany of the Blessed Virgin to implore God's mercy on his Church and all the faithful, and to thank him for his protection and countless benefits, especially for having saved Christianity from the Turkish's weapons at the victory at Lepanto (this Pontiff was propagator of the title of Helper and later a priest named St. Juan Bosco would be the propagandist of the devotion to Helper Mary of Christians). Later Pope Gregory III changed the feast to Our Lady of the Rosary.

Since Pope Pius V recommended the rosary to everyone, remembering that this prayer had achieved great successes in the war against the infidels, that this devotion had proven very effective to stop heresies and getting conversions, and that every fervent person should pray it often, the habit of praying the Rosary became wildly popular among all nations and its popularity was increasing every year. He was the one who gave the order to the Order of Preachers to propagate the Holy Rosary.

That's why we can date the birth of the Virgin of Rosary in Blanca to between 1573 and 1585. Christian lets us know that the fraternity of the Virgin of the Rosary, along with the one of Vera Cruz, were the most active fraternities in early 1570-1580. Today, the Brotherhood of the Virgin of Rosary still exists. Consequently, this is the oldest Brotherhood of Blanca.



The Standard of the Brotherhood of the Virgin of Rosary
Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos



The Brotherhood of the Virgin of Rosary
Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos



The Brotherhood of the Virgin of Rosary
Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos

Santa Ana Monastery in Jumilla

The report made by friar Juan de Pereda stated that the Moriscos of Blanca asked for preachers and confessors during Lent and had asked for the guardian of Jumilla to found their own monasteries¹. If this were true, it would mean that the Moriscos of Blanca did everything they could to become good Christians. After March 15 1562 two of the neighbours were burned during an Auto-da-fé by the Holy Inquisition in Santa Catalina de Murcia square, and many others - at least ten of them - were left without property².

The friars had to go in search of alms, which they obtained in exchange for auxiliary pastoral services, especially preaching and confession. This was how the friars of Santa Ana de Jumilla developed their pastoral work, preaching and preaching during Lent in search of alms, and surely Blanca was one of the most visited villages. We do not have much evidence that these friars effectively entered the town of Blanca before the expulsion, because the sacred books of Blanca do not mention this fact. They acknowledge that the friars preached in Blanca, but their origin was never known. But fortunately in the case of friar Bernardino Perez de Meca who was in Blanca on February 15 1615 we can assume that the brothers also came earlier to Blanca.

The primitive monastery of Santa Ana del Monte was established on August 4 1573 and was in the same place where, according to tradition, the rough wooden image of glorious Santa Ana was found - certainly long ago, Christians hid it there to keep it away from desecration and mockery of the Moors. The poor chapel built there by the religious founders consisted of huts covered with pine branches, which were also their cells, kitchen, etc. But the “avenues del monte”

¹ GONZÁLEZ CASTAÑO, Juan (1992). El informe de fray Juan de Pereda sobre los mudéjares murcianos en vísperas de la expulsión, año 1612. . En: Areas, vol. 14. pp. 222-235

² GARCÍA SERVET, J. (1978). El Humanista Cascales y la Inquisición murciana, Madrid. Págs. 120-124



Monasterio de Santa Ana del Monte
(CC BY-SA 4.0) Photo: María José Jiménez Guirao

soon forced our religious people to leave that place. Then a place atop a knoll that stood about 300 meters away was chosen to become the monastery. Today a wooden cross made from two branches of pine logs reminds the location of that chapel, which was dedicated to Santa Ana's grandmother from the late 15th century and was the first Franciscan settlement in the lands of Jumilla.

Friars who preached in Blanca

02/09/1596	02/09/1596	Minez, Pedro (Fray)	Book marriages
05/31/1602	05/31/1602	Quirol, Diego (Fray)	Baptisms book
06/19/1602	06/19/1602	Garces, Bartholomew (Fray, Franciscan)	Baptisms book
05/22/1604	24/05/1604	Santander, Luis (Fray)	Baptisms book
03/19/1605	03/19/1605	Torre, Luis (Fray)	Baptisms book
08/06/1607	08/06/1607	Molina, Juan (Fray)	Marriages book
10/11/1607	10/23/1607	Perez, Christopher (Fray, Augustino)	Baptisms book
28/03/1610	28/03/1610	Ballesteros, Pedro (Fray)	Baptisms book
21/04/1610	05/05/1610	Millan, Pedro (Fray, Franciscan)	Baptisms book
06/08/1611	19/06/1611	Paya, Jerome (Fray, Franciscan parish priest)	Baptisms book
02/15/1615	02/15/1615	Perez de Meca, Bernardino (Fray in Santa Ana - Jumilla)	Baptisms book

That hoary image is the one that stands in the honorary place of the current Convent Church. It was taken in 1573 from Santa Ana by the old Fray custodian Francisco Ximenez, one of the eight monks who

formed the Community, which is why they searched for a more suitable place for the "Source of the Pitcher" where the Convent and the Church would be built and so that the works would be finished in the first third of the 17th century. The Secular Franciscan Order was better known for its poverty and subsistence that always depended largely on handouts (the religious would step down barefoot in search of alms for Cieza instead of Jumilla); the contributions of the Council in the provision of land; donations by nobles and clergy, and the economic contributions of individuals, primarily with respect to the donation of devotional works (sculptures and paintings) and restoring them³.

The Brotherhood of Santa Ana

We have seen that the primitive Monastery of Santa Ana del Monte was founded on August 4 1573 in Jumilla. It stands to reason that the friars of Santa Ana de Jumilla developed their pastoral work preaching during Lent over the lands of the Region of Murcia, including the town of Blanca, in search of alms that as a result of such acts the Moriscos of Blanca decided to have a chapel Santa Ana Blanca. We do not know the exact date, but it must have been between 1574 and 1581, since in 1581 Maria Hernandez asked to be buried in the chapel of Santa Ana⁴. On the other hand we cannot forget that in recent years the devotion to the Lady Santa Ana was very normal. Abanilla, for example, was another town where many Moors and Christians held festivities⁵ in honor of Lady Santa Ana in 1565.

³ DELICADO MARTÍNEZ, Francisco Javier (1995). *Monjes y Monasterios Españoles: actas del simposium (1/5-IX-1995)* bajo dirección de Francisco Javier Campos y Fernández de Sevilla. El Convento de Santa Ana del Monte de Jumilla. Una fundación franciscana del siglo XVI. (Escrito por Francisco Javier Delicado Martínez). Colección del Instituto Escurialense de investigaciones históricas y artísticas, Nº 7. Págs. 1195 - 1259

⁴ Archivo Histórico Provincial de Murcia. Blanca, protocolo 9325, folio 37

⁵ Archivo de Abanilla. Acta del Concejo de fecha 25 de Julio de 1565

Saint Ana⁶ was the mother of Mary and grandmother of Jesus and after the 13th century would become, one of the most popular Latin-rite Christian saints. Unlike other chapels which were erected on the initiative of municipalities usually as a vow against a plague or epidemic these chapels were private places of worship, and although often built inside the parish church, sometimes they were built in the town. For Blanca we believe it was within the parish, since the testimony today points in this direction.

Many people in Blanca still do not know that in the past there was a Brotherhood of Santa Ana in Blanca. However, the image of Santa Ana was removed from its place in the parish at the time of the Civil War. Thereafter it was returned to its place and around 1953 given to an exhibition in Sevilla. The image did not return to Blanca and as from that time people are searching for its whereabouts. Fortunately we still have pictures of this saint and we can restore her chapel if necessary.

The chapel of Santa Ana

Blanca's wills are a powerful source of knowledge about their customs in the late 16th century. Basically all the wills send Masses for deceased relatives and even ask chapels or churches outside Blanca. Since 1586 we had a custom to give alms to the guilds of Blanca. Others have as their last will the wish to be buried in the chapel of Santa Ana. We also always found money in wills that necessarily goes to the redemption of captives.

Maria Hernandez, mortally wounded by her husband Juan Vega, asked in her will in 1581 to be buried in the chapel of Santa Ana⁷. In 1584

⁶ ROBLES, Juan de (1511). La vida y excelencias e milagros de santa Anna y dela gloriosa nuestra señora santa María fasta la edad de quatorze años: muy deuota y contemplatiuamente copilada (Sevilla, Jacobo Cromberger – BNM R/31).

⁷ Archivo Histórico Provincial de Murcia. Blanca, protocolo 9325, folio 37



The lost image of Santa Ana

Abellán de Vega made a will⁸ and ordered his body to be buried in the church of the town of Abarán. This will was changed in 1586 for another⁹ in which he ordered that his body be buried in the chapel of

⁸ Archivo Histórico Provincial de Murcia. Blanca, protocolo 9723, folio 55, en Ojós el 25 de abril de 1584.

⁹ Archivo Histórico Provincial de Murcia. Blanca, protocolo 9723, folio 223, en Blanca el 10 de diciembre de 1586

Santa Ana and that the brotherhood would accompany his body. Who made him change his mind in these two years? The fact that he asked to lay company to his brotherhood implies that the brotherhood was well organized at this time.

The brotherhoods probably dissolved between 1573 and 1586. This implies that on the day of the expulsion (1613) all people about 40 years old, may have already been well educated in the Catholic religion.

CHAPTER 2

Places of worship in Blanca

Blanca, of which the primitive name was Negra, is situated in the shire of Vega Alta of the Segura river in the Ricote Valley and has the area of 87.7 km², neighboring the municipalities of Abarán, Ricote, Ojós, Ulea, Fortuna, and Molina del Segura.

Since September 19 1304 it belongs to the order of Santiago after its handing over by Jaime II to don Juan Osores, Master of the order; they act on behalf of the Argons king Guillén de Pertusa and Miguel de Careal.

It belonged to the Jacobea Order until the death of the Master number 40 Don Alonso de Cárdenas declaring himself RR. CC. in 1493 Administrators of the Order, adding the Crown of Castile to his Mastership.

After the finalization of the reconquering the Church conducted a policy of major consolidation and intervention of its authority.

On 23 December 1500 a general visit was received in the Valley of Ricote in virtue of a Royal Commission from the Order of Santiago, presenting the power of Their Royal Highnesses to the mayor of Commentator Garcí Lasso de la Vega to the juries of Ricote and to the old people from the towns of the Valley. We guess that during the visit they explained in detail the aspirations of the Catholic Kings in relation to having a unique religion in Spain.

Fearing getting banished, on 15 August 1501, the day of the Assumption, the Moors of the Valley of Ricote got baptized in a massive way; on 21 September of the same year the RR. CC. decreed the baptism of the Moors.

With the quick conversion they faced the problem that there were no adequate buildings for Christian temples. The Order, visiting in 1503, asked King Fernando to turn the mosques into churches. He took the request to Rome and the Pope Julio II in Bulla granted on 23 August 1505, addressed to the Prior of Uclés, to the Deán de Jaén (Don Martín Fernández de Angulo) and Chantre de Sevilla as faithful executors of what was requested in it: the religious organization of the Ricote Valley that the Christian instruction must be given and authorized the Muslim mosques to be turned into churches, suggesting this way the first Christian temple of the area. As during this first time there were no priests to care for the population, chaplains from religious orders took care of it.

Blanca in 1507 is officially Christian; its population consists of 86 neighbours, but the clergy does not dare to leave the sacrament in the Church *porque no rezyde de contynuo en ella* (because he did not continuously live there).

During the visit of the Jacobea order in 1507 we find the first description of the church:

Then these visitors came to visit the church of this place of Saint John's vocation. It is made of two naves on pillars of wood and plaster covered with cane and tile. In this church there is an altar with certain images painted on paper. This place is well stocked with the necessary things. It has a front canvas with the image of Saint John. It has a serge with coloured edges on the ceiling. Some martial guards hang on the walls. It has a small wooden altarpiece painted with the fifth distress.

In 1613 the decree was made for the Moors to be banished from the Valley of Ricote (among other places) that was signed in Ventosilla by king Felipe III in October of the same year. In November of the same year the census of Blanca showed 13 old Christians and 677 Moors. Among the banished and those who left before being forcefully

registered there were about 200 residents who stayed in the vicinity. Taking into account that once the Count of Salazar left his return was favoured by the family that stayed, when visitor of the Order of Santiago Jerónimo de Medinilla came to the Valley in 1634 he was alarmed by the elevated existing population, making a report that recorded the towns filled with Moors even though he did not deny that many remained because they were Christians. The Counsel of the State was not alarmed since nothing justified the need for being alarmed, and so with just the parish to inform of how they lived being enough, at the ends of the XVII and XVIII centuries the fields were being populated, which led to the construction of hermitages that besides fulfilling the religious worship function served for social and economical functions as proclamations or edicts were placed on their doors, as well as economic requisitions and lists for the cams (forced recruitment) if necessary.

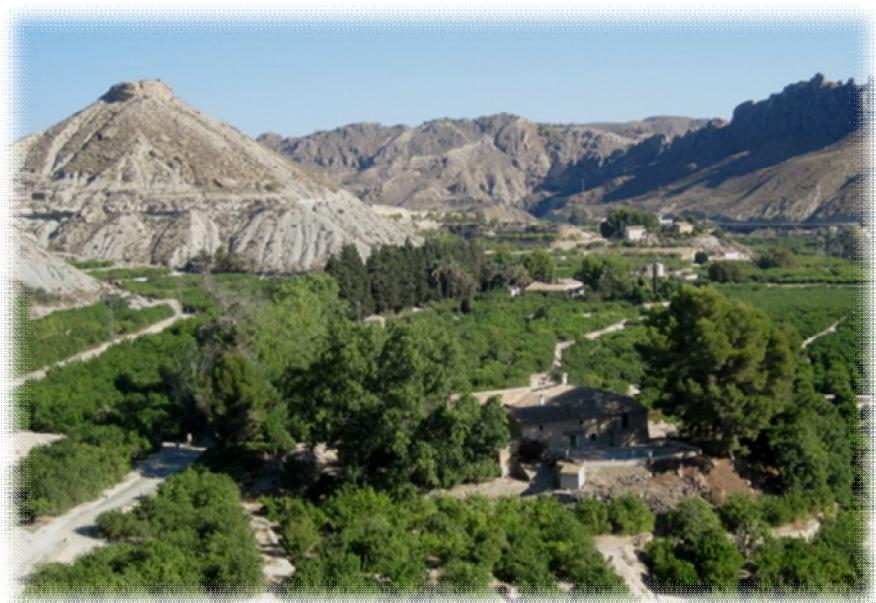
And inside our municipal term it was this way since during the visit of the vicar of Totana on February 21 1785, and it's stated in Book I of visits from the Jacobea Order file that the parish of Santiago cites the oratories and hermitages that existed.

In Book II of Visitors archives of the Parish of Santiago apostle of Totana on February 19 1789 we find the one made by D. Antonio de Gaona from the order of Santiago and of the Cloister and Guild of the Real Universidad de Salamanca, Beneficiary and the very own priest of the Parish in Totana:

Visit to the field hermitages

Partido Bazamba – Francisco Pinar Alarcon
Sierra de la Pila - Isabel de Molina
Quinares – Pedro Molina
El Esparragar – Juan de Molina Castillo
La Hoya

On this visit we found that in San Roque hermitage there was a wooden sculpture. A rural oratory took place in Juan de Molina's villa in the El Darrax territory. There was also another oratory at the same time in Juan de Molina's house, but this one was in the town of Blanca.



Darrax

Visits to the field hermitages

On July 1807 there was another visit of the **church authorities** in order to control the condition of the hermitages, and we notice many hermitages in Blanca field.

Bayna –Isabel de Molina's hermitage

La Hoya – San Roque hermitage, part of the village

Esparragar – Juan de Molina Castillo's hermitage

Quinares – Pedro Molina's hermitage

Sierra de la Pila – Josefa Cano's hermitage

Sierra de la Pila – Nuestra Señora de los Dolores hermitage, ownership of Isabel de Molina

Bazamba, San Antonio de Padua hermitage, ownership owed to the life of Francisco Pinar

Cabolcoy, hermitage owned by Antonio Fernández's widow

As we can see, the number of existent oratories and hermitages is high. Among them we will realize a simple study of the one of San Roque (patron saint of the area) which maintains a good condition, and about Concepcion which had vanished.

San Roque hermitage



Hermitage “San Roque”



Hermitage “San Roque”

In the description of the entrustment from Valle de Ricote in 1631 when the new Commander Don Fadrique de Toledo Osorio took possession of the job we probably found the origin of San Roque¹⁰ hermitage.

(fol. 3v) *At Blanca village on October the fourteenth one thousand six hundred and thirty-one, of Don Juan de Molina, current mayor of this village received the Captain Laurencio de Padilla González, mayor and administrator of this entrustment, presented the upstairs judge chamber and weighed up his compliance, justice, and regiment.*

The disposal of the mentioned mayor, once he knew about the judge chamber, ordered to fulfil every single one of the requirements as they were requested, and shall give a notoriety to the mercy of Fr. Estevan de Vera who is engaged as a priest of the parish of this village, and shall work for the purposes of the judge chamber. That is how Juan de Molina provided it to me, Blas Ruiz, scrivener (notary).

(fol. 8r) (On margin: Blanca inventory)

At Blanca village, which belongs to the Order and cavalry of Santiago, on the fourteenth day of October one thousand six hundred and thirty-one, Su Merced of Fr. Esteban de Vera from the “Santísima Trinidad” order, redemption of captives from the city of Murcia engaged as a priest of the parish of this village. And at the mercy of Juan de Molina, mayor of the village for his Majesty with the support of Captain Laurencio de Padilla González, mayor and administrator of this entrustment by his Excellence Don Fadrique de Toledo Osorio, marquis of Villanueva de Baldueza, General of the Royal Navy and Mar de Océano Army and warriors from Portugal kingdom pursuant to the Royal decree and Chapter of the Order of Santiago the description and inventory of the own members and rents that are part of the entrustment of this village has and (fol 8v) its situation, according to what the Royal decree and Chapter of the Order of Santiago demands:

¹⁰ AHN. Section OO. MM. Uclés. Leg. Carp. 293 nº 12

Description of the sale Tower from “La Losilla”

Around the Tower there is a hermitage named by the King, which is collapsed and all its midday canvas and its rooftop is sunken; it is necessary to work on it and rebuild it in order to celebrate in it like in the past.

It might be the “origin” of the San Roque’s hermitage.

The current one is included on the Urban Real-Estate-Villas registry of the town hall; Order number in the Inventory and Stocktaking book 7 Folio 35.

Status: Payment of “La Hoya” of San Roque.

Surface: 6.702 square meters.

In this document there is evidence that in addition to the hermitage there was a house, a fenced corral wall and an esplanade with a cistern for collection of rainwater.

San Roque has been the local patron saint since 1734 and it was in that year when (since Blanca after asking the intercession of San Roque it wasn’t affected by the plague) the Council, Justice, and Regiment of this village had committed to the building of a hermitage and at least one member of each family going to it in pilgrimage.

In connection with it, a document that we received from Mr. Muñoz Zieliski, El Postilion, 2nd year, March 16, is quoting:

“At Blanca village on march 16 1739 in front of my public notary and witnesses were presented Don Juan Fernandez and Don Jaime Triguero, Mayors, Don Francisco Molina Buendia and Don Diego Marin Hoyos, Aldermen, Council, Justice, and Regiment of the village, Don Antonio Molina Serrano, Don Francisco Javier de Molina, Don Pedro del Castillo Serrano, Don Francisco del Castillo Molina, Don Juan de Hoyos Torres,

Don Juan Pinar Molina, Pedro Hernandez Hoyos, Antonio Hernandez Hoyos, and Martin Triguero individuals of this village whom I attest to know.

And these ones, if on behalf of all the other residents of this village for those providing voice and capzion de rato manente pacto, will go through what will be contained in this writing are specific obligation of their persons and property.

And everyone as a whole, speaking as one and each individual by his insolidum, renouncing what implies the renounce of the commonwealth doubusrexdebendi and the current legitimate, hoc ita de fide rexoribus and the benefit of division and excursion and the others that should renounce, those who are obliged as a whole and under this commonwealth claimed that in the moment they find a collapsed hermitage of Lord San Roque on the territory of “La Hoya”, term and jurisdiction of this village at approximately half a league of distance in which are all accurate and necessary ornaments to celebrate the Holy Office of the Mass and other ornaments that are in this hermitage and bells to tap in there whenever a Mass is ready to be heard, and faithful people will arrive, which was celebrated under license from Lord Don Thomas Joseph de Montes, Archbishop of Cartagena, given in Murcia on December the fifth of one thousand seven hundred thirty-one, signed as the Eminence on its mandate, its Secretary Don Francisco Garcia de Avila, which was granted by this Lord under the memorial that was presented by the Council, Justice, and Regiment of this village.

And these grantors, having as they already have, since on the said chapel everything needed for the celebration of the Mass as calix, (s), ara, vestment and ornaments, from now on they are committed to the maintenance of the hermitage and bell, for this purpose the Lords of the Council, Justice, and Regiment of this village are meant to force all the individuals of the village and their belongings, furniture, and estates that they possess or might possess, reinforcing the mighty power of the Justice and

its Judges on the service of the Majesty, which can and must know the chance of being rewarded and compels the fulfillment of this obligation as sentence passed on a judged authority, and accepted by these grantors. Renounced the law, privileges and rights in their favor, the overall form and rights of the village. And they granted and signed it, before witnesses Don Francisco Molina Pinar, Presbyter, and Don Diego Triguero, presbyter of the village, Don Vizente Perez, doctor of the village, all of whom I, the Scrivener, attest to know."

It can be deduced that its construction started towards the end of 1735 or at the beginning of 1736.



The hermitage has a baroque style; it has a three nave construction with the lateral ones having lower height, covered with barrel vaults separated by pillars with rounded arches that form chapels. Its transept is covered with a hemispherical dome.

The altarpiece is neoclassical, of polychrome stucco that imitates qualities and shades of jasper.

The side chapel has a square layout, is covered with a groin vault over lunettes with first-rate mural decoration in which are represented the attributes and emblems typical of San Roque.



The sides are covered with decorative paintings possibly dating to the beginning of the XIX century, within the Neoclassical aesthetic with decorative variants typical of the time, such as a Pompeian style, or reminders of the last Murcian baroque that can be observed in the trompe l'oeil of the right lateral wall where a door ajar is simulated.

The rest of the decoration imitates the painted papers typical of the reigns of Charles IV and Ferdinand VII, such as rosettes, frets, branch-like patterns, crowns of laurel, borders... In the corners there are painted columns of the Corinthian order imitating qualities and textures of marble with reddish and brown shades.



As we can see in the photograph, it has a pulpit.



The front wall has an oval seethrough with delicate vegetation inscribed in rhomboid frames.

In the superior part of its belfry there is a Cross of Caravaca also for protection.

The Ermita de la Concepción

In the documentation that we have available about the hermitage “Ermita de la Purísima Concepción” there is a pious memory in which it is mentioned amongst other things that a prayer should be said to “Nuestra Señora de la Concepción” which indicates that ever since early days there existed a devotion to the named dedications, so it is not surprising that the hermitage could possibly date to the XVI century.

There is another mention in writing by Pedro Cachopo and his wife María de Molina from 1585 in which a paragraph mentions a hermitage located on the Royal Road which may refer to the one of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción.

In guest Book III of the vicarage of Totana we find one visit paid to Blanca on October 27 1628 by the L^{do}. Dⁿ. Diego Carralero of the robe of Santiago, Preacher of His Majesty, benefited priest of the village of Aledo and Totana, and a general Visitor of the village by Royal and Apostolic authority, who says in relation to the ermita de la Concepción:

In the village on the day, month, and year, the Visitor continuing his present visit visited the ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Concepción of which the graduate Don Francisco Pinar and Dn. Juan de Hoyos Torres are patrons as the holders of the ties founded by the graduate Don Francisco de Hoyos, a priest who belonged to Abarán and founded this hermitage which is next to the walls of this village, and which was found to be almost blinded by sand and pebbles and with a damaged ceiling, and in a way that it is no longer useful, and for this reason for many years the image is in the church, and one cannot return to the hermitage and the priest, Justice, and Regiment and other ecclesiastics and chief men who were present accompanying His Mercy on the visit to the hermitage reported that the cause of



Previous place of the Hermitage Ermita de la Concepción



Previous street of the Hermitage Ermita de la Concepción

this ruin is the great flow of water that comes down from the hill next to the slope of which the hermitage is located, and that remaining in that site it will always be exposed to the same continuous wear that it has now, and which is not remediable if it is not founded again in another site that the patrons have for that purpose, in front of the houses of Don Martín de Molina, immediately next to where it is now, which recognized His Mercy of Sr, Visitor, and I plan to give all the providence that is convenient and I attest that for it to be on the record he had it diligently stated that I sign.

Graduate Carralero

Before me

Antonio Lucas González

I indict about repairs to the hermitage and about needed repairs.

During a visit made to Blanca by Mr. Graduate Juan María Sanz, General Visitor of the Cartagena Bishopric, and by the Illustrious Mr. D. Francisco Fernández de Angulo, Bishop of the Bishopric, on September 16 1701 he lets us know that because the parish church had been demolished in order to rebuild it, the Holy Sacraments are in the hermitage of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción situated in this village. In guest Book I of the Order of Santiago it is stated in 1785:

Visit to the Ermita de la Concepción

In the Villa de Blanca on the twenty-second day of the month of February of the year seventeen hundred and eighty five Mister Visitor, continuing this spiritual Holy Visit, extending it to the hermitage and sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción situated outside the walls of the village, and having found it lacking a framed picture and without ornaments or decorations for celebrations and its structure on the verge of collapse I command next that Joaquín Sánchez, master builder of this village of the hermitage be notified, and recognizing its structure to certify the state in which it is, and how much it will cost to

repair it, which once sent this notification was put in effect, and under this certification I am presenting the master stated it is necessary to demolish the vaults and roofs of the hermitage due to too much pressure being exerted by other vaults and since owing to being too degraded they have broken the walls of its structure; and to repair them and for it to be left with appropriate security he stated it would be necessary to rebuild other vaults and to secure them with a nailed wooden lattice, and that for all of this two thousand eight hundred and fifty reales de vellón would be needed and that, likewise, the Parish priest of this Village should be notified by virtue of appearance he should state what ornaments and jewelry the mentioned hermitage has and their whereabouts, which was carried out by another priest stating that another hermitage has a silver lamp that is located in the parish, with dawn and chalice. His Mercy commanded that all of this should be placed in the other hermitage after it has been repaired or built anew, with the income earned from censuses, and to be earned as wished the Graduate Don Francisco de Hoyos, a priest formerly of Abarán, attending as he and many others are buried there, because even though it lacks a fund it is presumed His Mercy this was the intention of the founder, and the rest of the wealth that was invested in endowments to marry female orphans as its founder intended, and with summons of the Priest and Local Council despite the procedure that persists provided by His Mercy, saw fit to name as administrator of the funds of the pious work the presbyter Don Pedro Fernández whose appointment was approved by the Village and it was compulsory to grant him as a person along with the priest enough power so that he would be able to receive the pensions earned and to come, and to distribute them according to what was determined by the founder; whose appointment he accepted along with aforementioned Don Pedro, requiring their fulfillment and by virtue of and procedures that followed regarding the issue had His Mercy saw fit to provide the one that follows this continuation of which he gave testimony to the Village for their

enforcement and fulfillment, and the original procedures were ordered to be sent to the Church archive for their safekeeping and permanence and I can attest that so that in this manner it is on the record His Illustriousness had it diligently stated that I sign. Don Gaona

Before me: Juan Joseph María Molina

At the beginning of the 19th century this hermitage remained a place for burials and a provisional churchyard since the Royal Decree of April 26 1804 given by the King Charles IV due to the epidemic yellow fever and order dated 26 May 1806 established the construction of a graveyard funded by the neighbours, and if not possible, by the parish factory's revenues.

Let us look at this excerpt from a death certificate, from the Parish Book of Deaths which records that they have been buried there:

In the town of Blanca on November 19 1818 died Francisco Lopez, a widower to Maria Cano, who received the Holy Sacraments. Did not claim to be poor; and was buried in the Conception hermitage, I hereby sign and testify.

D. Josef Ramón Ximénez

In the town of Blanca on August 12 1825 died of dysentery Ms. Isabel Molina aged seventy-five years, and widow of Joaquín Yelo, from this neighbourhood. She received the Blessed Penance Sacraments, Holy Viaticum and Extreme-unction, and left her will to D. Diego Trigueros, a public notary in this village, on March 15 this year. Among other things she also ordered to be buried in a regular burial and a requiem, and to pray for her soul in fifty masses, thirty for her brother D. Josef Santiago, and three for the holy Cristo de las Penas. She also ordered her forced demands to be paid, established by the extinct courts and approved by her majesty. Named for her sole

executor the Parish Priest, his nephews and heirs; and finally to be buried in the Conception hermitage, a temporary cemetery of that parish, I hereby sign and testify as your lieutenant priest.

D. Pedro Pérez

In 1826 the first cemetery started to be built, and she could be buried here.

Pascual Madoz in his *Illustrated Geography Dictionary. History of Spain and Its Overseas Possessions and Republic of America* (Madrid 1850) also refers to it and quotes:

“in the entrance to the town walls the Conception hermitages can be seen; and on the same line and an hour away the San Roque one. In the field there are several places where there are eight more hermitages, in which farmers of the vicinity can attend masses.”

In connection with the disappearance of the Conception hermitage and the difficult possibility of finding its remains it has been the subsidence that occurred in 1888 and 1894 in the area where the hermitage was situated, and that was echoed by the press, although it does not quote anything about it:

Diario de Murcia, September 14 1888 on page 2 inside La Provincia published:
BLANCA
September 10 1888

Mr. D. José Martínez Tornel

My dear friend: A few days ago I told V. in one of my letters the severe and difficult circumstances that crossed this population due to the many tragedies in a short three-year period. Very little time has passed, and one of those misfortunes,

and the most dangerous of all, has been putting a pen in my hand to allow me now to make public through your popular journal the horrible catastrophe that this unfortunate man suffers nowadays due to the torrential rains that have been falling every day, starting from the 1st day of this month.

Anyone who has visited this small town in the past called Court of the Valley, which may well be called The Valley of Misery, will understand only by reading the title, despite how scruffy it was, the great damage it has caused.

Blanca is located in the arid and rugged slopes of Sierra del Castillo, San Cristóbal or Peña Negra. Its streets are usually narrow, especially on the northern side of stepped and irregular soil; they all get the water and debris descending from the mountain slopes; water and debris so abundant at this time, which have flooded the town and the garden; they have cut and destroyed roads, trails, paths, and so on; since the wadis and ravines have left out in such a way that nothing has been quite devastating to contain its momentum. The walls, fences, most of them have been destroyed; so what was once a beautiful orange orchard has today become a promenade under ruins which keep buried vegetation and maize. The channels by which running waters fertilize the land part are blind and others totally destroyed; and above all, how threatened the lives of some people are, those who have their abode near the foothills of the mountains; because these enormous boulders emerge so hard that the neighbourhood is kept in continuous alarm; both in the village and the garden have been several collapses of houses and every day you can hear more further injury reports. There is no inheritance that does not have so many losses to be sorry for; well the damage has been so huge that no one has escaped from it; it seems as if Providence has decreed grieve for a long time with so many great calamities.

Many years ago the orange disease and its congeners started to make us sick and still nowadays the terrible plague has not disappeared; then the stone clouds have lost and damaged the harvest of fruits in some years; Segura's straight

avenues have caused terrible tolls on the banks, and not so long in the past (about 5 months ago) that in the least expected moment, part of the main weir that pushes waters from that led from this garden has been destroyed; its reconstruction has been verified with the amount of 52 per tahulla: and if all this were not enough, the depreciation of the fruit has been so bad that in the markets both foreign and domestic it has been rejected. And to make it even worse, my dear friend, this sad and unfortunate misfortune that I have just related.

The mayor has informed the Governor so that he lets the Honourable Minister of the Interior know about it.

Will we ever find some remedy to our misfortunes and misery? I am hopeless; this town is so dejected that no one is ever interested in it, and so we suffer a tragedy, one after another; but everything has its limit and our forces are too weak to stand all of this.

And as such a timed occasion takes place, the municipality of this town and the people who by their circumstances and conditions are able to speak out make efforts to find a remedy for small ills where possible and prevent them from happening in the future. It is such an opportunity to show, even if it is a little, whether they love and zeal towards the communal interest, and if possible, the reconstruction of roads, the cleaning and leveling of the streets in order to provide an easy exit to the water and debris, and both this and more, run where they should run to avoid further damage and bad moments.

I beg your pardon, kind readers of this illustrated newspaper, to fill one of your columns with my lamentations, and V., Director, for any inconvenience that I may cause. Yours sincerely with love,

Antonio Molina González

If that was not enough, a few years later we found:



Diario de Murcia, June 17 1894 on page 2 published:

FLOODINGS IN BLANCA

A friend of ours who came to this town yesterday confirmed the news that our dear friend Don Antonio Molina González told us about the importance of the tragedy affecting this neighbourhood, because of the incessant building collapses caused by the movements of the hill that overlooks a part of the population.

The panic that afflicts the neighbourhood is perfectly justified as the phenomenon has not ceased and they fear new landslides.

The news that we have been given yesterday by the civil government is not comforting at all.

Six houses have been completely destroyed apart from the hospital house and a shelter for poor people; several fruit stores and some fences that hold the cattle.

The pile of houses at the foot of the mountain has been placed nine meters higher than the orchards, completely changing the look of that area.

The Governor, according to what we have heard, has not yet departed for the town on the grounds that once gubernatorial measures have been adopted, what follows is a field survey performed by public works personnel, and to adopt what is recommended by such experts.

The circumstance of the chief Engineer being absent busy with other works in the province and the same for the provincial architect has impeded carrying out the survey, being probable that tomorrow it will be possible to carry it out and in this case maybe tomorrow Mr. Settier will also march to Blanca.

He has given certain instructions to the first deputy mayor of the local council D. Roque Valiente who the day before yesterday arrived with the objective of conferring with the authority.

The civil guard of the post has since the very beginning of this misfortune been providing all kinds of aid to the unfortunate ones who lost their homes in a moment.

The cases of land subsidence gave birth to the neighbourhood now known as *Hundio* (sunk) or Barrionuevo next to Concepción street, surely in the zone where the hermitage of the same name was located, and since rebuilding took place over the aforementioned, it makes it very difficult to identify where it was located.

Heritage of the Barrio del Café



The remains of the hermitage of Bayna

The remains of the hermitage of Bayna are in the now called Barrio del Café and it is a building with a rectangular floor plan, gable roof, without decorative ornaments, but that has the peculiarity of the small bell that would let the faithful know about religious services situated on the side opposite the door above where the main altar is, and it has a small water laver near the entrance. As all aforementioned hermitages, it lacks a tower.

Until the Spanish Civil War, mass was celebrated in it on Sundays and the Virgin of the Rosary was taken there on a Sunday of October (during the Rosarios de la Aurora). It is not remembered there being anything related to the Fuensanta, but it is remembered that there was an image of apostle Santiago and that on the day of his onomastics it was taken outside in a procession and a day of festivities was carried out.

Having visited it, we were able to observe that it was originally smaller and was possibly expanded by Purificación Gómez Valiente, its owner and who had various arable lands in the region. It would be one of the rural hermitages also mentioned by Pascual Madoz.

The church San Juan Evangelista



The church “San Juan Evangelista” of Blanca

We will now make a short review of the already mentioned parish church of San Juan Evangelista built over the preceding Moorish mosque. The license for its construction was obtained in 1692, granted by the vicar of Totana D. Alonso José de la Flor y Cañamero, the council, and local authorities. Remembrance of the works was presented by the master builder of Lorca D. Juan Fernández García, but for personal reasons he did not perform them. The brothers Lucas and Antonio de la Lastra worked as masons with the latter having died here in 1696.



Seemingly the works ended in 1716 since on a visit on April 12 1717 paid by his Excellency Sr. D. Luis Belluga, Bishop of Cartagena to the priest, clergy, and secular ministers, in addition to what is appropriate of such visits, went to the ossuary where they said the customary responsories, administered the Holy sacrament of Confirmation and, among other things, instructed the priest that no one shall be buried in their own grave in the ones of the new church without having beforehand taken away the title of the old ones. In 1721 we find the first description of the new church:

"the main doors are made of new wood, big and thick and lined with tin, which borders with the public square of this village, and on the other sides with public streets. The front and corners are made of carved stone and the rest is made of brand new masonry; and its tower is new as well - the corners and ledges are made of well executed carved stone, as with the whole church, the vault of the choir is very broken down in a way that threatens complete ruin, and in this same manner the second body of the building to the right of its entrance manifests considerable breakdown. Its nave is composed of four bodies

and arches, its main altar and two sacristy rooms with new door... the altar has a wooden altarpiece, small and very old, with some paintings on the wood itself, and is in a sorry state, in it is a wooden tabernacle, golden, well kept”.

From what is mentioned it seems that the building was somewhat deficient and with the passage of time it was repaired several times, and in this manner on the visit of 1734 we find:

“...and the building of the church, the structure of the walls which are made of lime and stone, with its slopes of carved stone and its main door facade mostly made of carved stone, and the tower of masonry with its corners and ledges of carved stone, and its spire of bricks and lime, and all the structure and tower are very firm, with the exception of some elements that are known, some vaults and arches, the church is cloistered with its transept and two chapels per side, and next to the main one is where the benches of the church are placed, and through it one exits to an uncovered area contiguous to the ossuary, both being built out of masonry, and to the left of the main chapel is located the sacristy on the wall of which is located a window facing the main street made out of pinewood, and on it there is an iron grate, and in the main chapel there is a very small and old altarpiece with two shields of the Order of Santiago on the sides that are composed of eight small pictures of different images, one of them of Mister San Juan Evangelista, head of the parish, which are due to their age in a sorry state, and only the tabernacle made of golden wood where the Blessed Sacrament is placed is in a good state, and it was bought with alms by neighbours of this village, and near the entrance of the doors of the church to their left in another chapel is found the laver of the holy Baptism which is made of stone with a one piece wooden lid and key, and in the body of the church there are two lavers for the holy water made of the same material and over the first arch of the church is found the choir with its turned wood rails, and placed in it there is a well made medium sized organ built with

alms from neighbours of this village, and the roofing of the church is composed of wood and tiles, and the doors are lined with good quality tin made by the population of this village, that on the east and west borders with public streets, and in the middle with the public square”.



At present in addition to the parish Church the locality has the Capilla de "La Milagrosa" for worship (the current one dates to August 17 1965) belonging to the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of san Vicente de Paúl; the Iglesia de san Pedro apóstol, the first stone of which was placed on February 25 1981 blessed by the parish priest D. Roberto Sánchez Muñoz, located in the neighbourhood called Alto del Palomo; the Iglesia de la Sagrada Familia, in the neighbourhood of the Alto de Bayna from 1986, and the church of “Nuestra Señora la Virgen del Pilar”, inaugurated on October 12 1993 by the priest D. Pedro Camacho in the neighbourhood of the Estación férrea.



The church of “Nuestra Señora la Virgen del Pilar”



The church of “Nuestra Señora la Virgen del Pilar”

Chronology and some data regarding worshiping places in Blanca

Nov 15 1507

Visit of Santiago's Order: First parish description in the previous Moorish mosque. A painted image of St. John in the front; a small wooden altarpiece with a picture of La Quinta Angustia (Fifth Sorrow).

Priest: Hernando de Aroca (cleric of St. Peter's Order).

October 27 1628

Chapel of Our Lady of the Conception/*founded by Mr. Francisco de Oyos, former Abarán priest/adjacent to the village walls / almost blind of sand and pebbles and a ruined ceiling / the image is in the Church.*

Priest: Fray Pedro Yago (Trinitarian).

October 14 1631

Chapel near the Losilla Tower / dedicated to the Kings / *the canvas and the entire highest part of the ceiling has sunk, it is necessary to work on it and put it back into shape so that one can give mass in it like before.*

Priest: Fray Esteban de Vera (Trinitarian).

1692

License for parish construction granted by Totana's vicar D. Alonso José de la Flor y Cañamero. The memory of the works was presented by master builder Juan Fernández García, but he for personal reasons did not execute them.

Priest: Fray Tomás Marín (Franciscan) and Antonio Fernández (Priest).

September 16 1701

Visit of Mr. Juan María Sanz, General Inspector of the Diocese of Cartagena by the Illustrious Mr. D. Francisco Fernández de Angulo, bishop from the aforementioned Diocese, reveals that due to the parish church being demolished to be rebuilt the Holy Sacraments are in the chapel of the Conception.

Priest: Fray Diego del Castillo (Franciscan).

April 12 1717

Visit of Hon. Mr. D. Luis Belluga, bishop of Cartagena, to the newly built parish church.

Priest: Gabriel Candel (Son of the town).

October 29 1721

Visit of D. Fernando Díaz Ossa, General Inspector of the Diocese of Cartagena and first description of the new parish: *the new front doors are made of wood, large, thick, and covered in tinplate, which adjoins to the public square of this town, and by the other parts, public streets. The cover and corners are made of carved stones and the rest is made entirely of masonry; its tower is also new, the corners and cornices are made of well made carved stones, as the entire aforementioned church, the choir vault is damaged in such a way that threatens to break entirely, just like the second section of the brickwork. To the right side of the entrance there is considerable rot. Its nave is formed by four bodies and arcades, its main altar and two sacristy rooms have new painted doors... the altar had a small and very old wooden altarpiece with some paintings in the same wood and indecently found on top of it a gold wooden tabernacle of good service.*

As we see, it had certain flaws.

Priest: Martín Molina Serrano.

July 9 1734

Description, in which the "flaws" are arranged: *...and done by the aforementioned church of which the brickwork is made of lime and stone with its carved stone slopes and main entrance façade, the biggest part made of that material. The masonry Tower with its carved stone corners and cornices and spire made of bricks and lime. The entire aforementioned brickwork and towers are of great firmness except for some elements that are known from some vaults and arches. The aforementioned church, with its cloistered crossing and two chapels on both sides and next to the largest one, is the place where the church's benches are placed and if one goes through it, one gets to exposed places next to the ossuary both made out of masonry and to the left of the aforementioned largest chapel is the sacristy which is placed on a wall with a window that faces the main street, the window is made of pine wood with an iron fence. In the largest chapel there is*

a very small and old altarpiece with two Order of Santiago's insignia on both sides which consists of eight small paintings of different images and one of those of Mr. St. John the Evangelist, titular of the parish, which are found by their indecent antiquity, only the golden Tabernacle made of wood (where the Blessed Sacrament is) is found in a respectable state, the tabernacle was purchased with the village residents' alms. Beside the doors of the mentioned Church entrance to the left in another Chapel is the Baptismal Font, which is made of stone with a single-piece wooden cover, and there are two holy water bowls made of the same brickwork and, on top of the first arcade there is the quire with the toned wood handrails and there is a medium-sized organ gotten from the village inhabitants' alms, and the aforesaid church cover is made of wood and tiles, while the doors are covered with a nice tinplate, the brickwork can be found in the village, the church adjoins with public streets on the west and with the public square in the center.

Priest: Francisco Mateo Montoro.

March 16 1739

St. Roch's chapel / it started under the license of Mr. Tomas Joseph de Montes, Archbishop of Cartagena, given in Murcia on December 5 1735 / chapel finished and manufactured / about half a league away / all ornaments required to celebrate the Mass / and bells.

Priest: Diego Trigueros.

February 21 1785

Lecture about Our Lady of the Conception / Scale picture / Ms. Ángela López's houses / everything in perfect condition.

Baina Chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Fuensanta / image painted on a regular old picture frame that was sent to be removed and replaced by another one to cause proper devotion.

Priest: Joaquín Parra.

February 22 1785

Chapel and Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Conception /
extramural / with no image in the frame and no ornaments / in bad condition.

Priest: Joaquín Parra.

February 19 1789

D. Francisco Pinar Alarcón's church / picture of St. Anthony of Padua/Bazamba

Ms. Isabel Molina's Church / picture of Our Lady of Sorrows / Sierra de la Pila

D. Pedro Molina's church / unadorned / Quinares

D. Juan de Molina Castillo's church / no quote or image

St. Roch's church / scale picture / Hoya

D. Juan Molina's rural chapel / picture of St. Paschal Baylon /

Darrax

All of those were *found in proper conditions*

Priest: Fray Carlos Germán (Franciscan Graduate).



**Pinar's House
(Casa Pinar in relationship with Francisco Pinar Alarcon)**

February 27 1789

Lecture in D. Juan de Molina's houses / picture of St. Francis Xavier

Lecture in Ms. Isabel Molina's houses

Priest: Fray Carlos Germán (Franciscan. Graduate).

July 26 1807

Lecture in D. Juan de Molina's country house / picture of St. Paschal Baylon /there were no ornaments said D. Juan himself, who had it in his house.

Priest: José Valentín y Bisset.



**Serrano's Hermitage
(Ermita Serrano in relationship with Isabel Molina's Church
and Casa Serrano)**

July 27 1807

Speech in D. Juan de Molina's houses / picture of St. Francis Xavier

Speech in Ms. Isabel de Molina's houses / does not specifies whom it is dedicated to.

Priest: José Valentín y Bisset.

July 28 1807

Ms. Isabel de Molina's chapel / Bainá

St. Roch's chapel / Hoya

D. Juan de Molina Castillo's chapel / Esparragar (or Estartagar)

D. Pedro Molina's chapel / Quinares

Josefa Cano's chapel / Sierra de la Pila
Ms. Isabel de Molina's chapel / picture of Our Lady of Sorrows
/ Sierra de la Pila
Mr. Francisco Pinar widow's chapel / St. Anthony of Padua /
Bazamba
Antonio Fernandez widow's chapel / Cabolcoy
Those were all found *with proper integrity, as they were*
supposed to be.
Priest: José Valentín y Bisset.



**Castillo's House
(Casa Castillo in relationship with Juan de Molina Castillo's church)**

1850

The geographic-statistical-historical Dictionary of Spain and its overseas possessions of Paschal Madoz says: In the village entrance the walls of the chapel of the Conception can be seen; in the same direction and an hour away is San Roch's one. In some spots of the field there are up to eight more chapels, and the surrounding inhabitants hear mass there.

Priest: Cayo Ortega Muñoz.



**The disappeared altar of the chapel of Casa Castillo's House
(Casa Castillo in relationship with Juan de Molina Castillo's church)**

August 16 1965

Church of La Milagrosa (current) gets blessed. The building was given for thirty years to the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul by D. Pedro del Portillo y Ortega in 1897 for Hospital and School.

"Asylum" priest: Emilio Riquelme Sánchez (Assistant)

Jan 25 1981

First stone of the St. Peter the Apostle's Church, in the neighbourhood of Alto del Palomo.

Priest: Roberto Sánchez Muñoz.



St. Peter the Apostle's Church in Blanca

1986

Church of the Holy Family in the neighbourhood of Alto de Bainá.

Priest: Roberto Sánchez Muñoz.



Church of the Holy Family

October 12 1993

Church of Our Lady the Virgin of Pilar, in the Barriada railway station.

Priest: Pedro Camacho.

Then these visitors visited the church of that place that has as vocation Saint John. It is made of two ships on pillars of plaster and wood covered by cane and tile. The church has an altar with certain images painted on paper. This place is well decorated of the good things. A front canvas has an image of Saint John. Its ceiling has a twill with colored edges. Some martial guards hang on the walls. It has a small wood altarpiece with a painting of the fifth sorrow.

CHAPTER 3

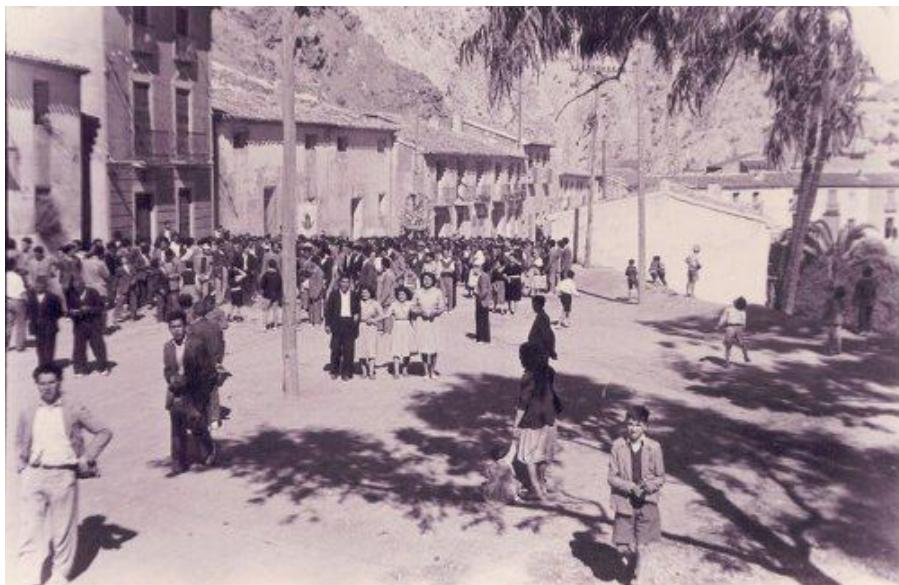
Patronages of Blanca

Blanca, the municipality anchored to the Valley of Ricote of which the original name was Negra, on the left edge of Segura at the bottom of the Peña Negra, is 87,7km² long and 233m wide with the population of 6,451 (to 31 December 2012). It got the title of Valley at the hands of king Felipe II on 10 August 1591, 2,400 reales previously paid. It was free from the Order of Santiago and the infantes of the royal house in 1851 after the signature of the Concordato between the Holy See and the Spanish Government by the Bula “*Quo gravius*”. Its parish was erected over the previous Moorish mosque, s. XVII-XVIII in austere Baroque style and dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist. The saint patrons of Blanca are **Saint Roque** and **Our Lady la Virgen de los Dolores**.

We don't know the exact date when they were named the local saint patrons. We only have a quotation in the diary “El Tiempo” dated 15 August 1922 by the parson D. Enrique Sánchez Guillén, murdered in his hometown Archena on 17 October 1936 nearing the early hours of the morning at the outskirts of the town at the nowadays nonexistent Venta Picolo on the way from Archena to Madrid at his age of 60. He quotes that **Our Lady la Virgen de los Dolores is saint patron from 1758** and that *the gratitude to the received from the heavens forced our elders to commit to the promise of celebrating pilgrimage of the festivities in April in honour of glorious Saint Roque in the procession to his beautiful Hermitage of the fields in the valley of his term, the one that is true from 1734 when it was offered.*

Saint Roque

Saint Roque could possibly have been the patron of Blanca since 1734. It can be deduced from a document of 1739 that the first celebration of the hermitage would have been in that year once the work was finished and they had everything necessary to celebrate the Eucharist even though, because of the facts previously quoted by D. Enrique Sánchez Guillén it could be that Saint Roque had been patron since 1734 and it had been celebrated at the area where the hermitage would be, of which the construction began in December of 1735.



Pilgrimage of Saint Roque in the place “El Hundido”
Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos

The current sculpture of Saint Roque is by the sculptor Federico Coullaut-Valera Mendigutia (Madrid, 25 April 1912 – Granja de San Ildefonso, 13 April 1989) done in 1941, since its original was destroyed during the sad civil war, and photographs of it helped to model the current one.

The elders told that after the war Saint Roque of Villanueva was brought to walk a procession here since we did not have a patron and, taking advantage of mayor D. Emilio Fernández Parra going to Madrid to boost the file of the encirclement road of our town in February of 1941 it was entrusted to him to take advantage of his stay to oversee the way for the next holidays of April to have an image of our saint patron, entrusting its execution to the good imaginary; the cost would be credited by popular subscription at the head of which was the City council; the commission was given to the sculptor Federico Coullaut-Valera.



Pilgrimage of Saint Roque near the Hermitage
Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos

When the new sculpture arrived in Blanca, it was so greatly welcomed by the town that the sculptor and the mayor, as if they were

bullfighters, walked around the Church square broad-shouldered. The artist, according to technicians, knew how to communicate the creative and religious spirit to the wood in a way that is not unbecoming to the ones done by imaginaries of the first third of the XIX century.

San Roque, de Federico Coullaut-Valera, 1941

The sculpture is done in polychrome and gilded wood with gold and corlada silver that has a height of 1.20m and represents Saint Roque standing with a pilgrim's cane and the left hand picking up his robes showing the stigmata on his knee, with a dog carrying a piece of bread in his mouth and an angel on his left. They are over a pedestal of 0.92 x 0.72m, signed with the sculptor's name Federico Coullaut Valera and the date MCMXLI. The price of the figure was 10,500 pesetas paid by popular subscription at the head of which was the City council with 2,000 pesetas.

Pilar Vallalta Martínez performed the last restoration in 2011.

Blanca celebrates Saint Roque, canonized by Pope Gregory XIII in 1584, on two occasions: during the months of April and August. the first occasion in April doesn't have an exact date since the Easter Week doesn't either, the greater day of the Celebration now being celebrated on the first Friday following Good Friday. On that day at eight in the morning after the mass the town goes in celebration to the hermitage of the saint patron, carrying him in his bier from the parish about five kilometres to the hermitage. Upon his arrival a Mass is celebrated. It's a day of coexistence, sharing, meeting... nobody is foreign. In the afternoon he is again carried on shoulders in his bier back to the town where he is received by the local authorities and the priest, going in procession to the parish to the sound of "*La Burra*" and the firing of hundreds of firecrackers and rockets. At these parties an offering of flowers and fruits is given, dances huertanos, parades of floats happen..., finishing on Sunday with a long line of firecrackers to end the celebrations.



A man announces Saint Roque's celebration throwing rockets.

Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos

The altarpiece is found on the left side of the parish church of Saint John the Evangelist and was blessed and opened on 16 August 1946 at 10 in the morning after a solemn religious function in honor of our Patron Saint Roque, donated by the City council. The date of the celebration in August is fixed since Saint Roque died on the 16th of the month. The celebration is totally different and on this occasion they have the lock down of bulls, declared Regional Tourist Interest on 8 March 1990, as main attraction and the taurine fair in which figures of the bullfighter's ladder participate with ice pickers. The procession is done along the streets of the town on the 16th.



Saint Roque leaving the church (Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos)

We must mention the baroque Hermitage of the XVIII century, a building of three auditoriums of lower height on the sides, covered with a barrel vault, separated by pillars with arches of half a point that form chapels. Its transept is covered with a semispherical dome. The altarpiece is neoclassic, of polychrome stucco that imitates the qualities and tones of jasper. The dressing room has a square base covered with a groin vault over lunettes with high quality mural decoration in which the attributes and emblems of Saint Roque are shown. The sides are covered with decorative paintings and in the corners there are columns painted of Corinthian order imitating the quality and texture of marble with reddish and brown tones.



Saint Roque entering into the hermitage
(Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos)



Procession of Saint Roque
(Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos)

Our Lady la Virgen de los Dolores

As I stated in the beginning, according to the parson D. Enrique Sánchez Guillén – murdered in his hometown Archena on 17 October around one in the morning in the outskirts of the town, the nowadays nonexistent Picolo, on the way from Archena to Madrid at his age of 60 – she has been a patron of Blanca since 1758 and even though I haven't found the information to verify it, it is very likely that on page 30 in Book I of Deaths in the Archive in the Parish Church of Saint John the Evangelist there is the death certificate from 9 April 1769 of Josefa Molina Buendía, *of maiden state, received the Last Rites and was buried with the robes of a child from Saint Francisco, in the chapel of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores where she was patron*, which shows that it is possible that she already was patron at the time.

D. Francisco Javier de Molina Martínez, Perpetual Governor of Murcia, as stated in the State Archive of Vienna, sign. 1667 18/927, a note from the Marquees of Erendazu addressed to him communicates the concession of the title of Marquees of Darrax in Madrid received on 3 August 1708 and a confirmation or constancy in Vienna on 24 August of 1723, and certified of concession (Vienna, 12 November 1728) along with the previous Vizcondado of the same denomination. He was born in Blanca on 26 April 1688, was the second son of D. Martín de Molina de la Vega, also blanqueño, general collector of the royal rent and services of millions of the kingdom of Murcia, that got the robes of the Order of Santiago for his sons Martín Alfonso and Francisco Javier in 1701, also two regidurías in the City council of Murcia. He contributed in a significant way to the Parish whose license he got in 1692 granted by the vicar of Totana D. Alonso José de la Flor y Cañamero. From the family of the Marquees of Darrax comes the link to the uninterrupted patronage of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, which is why it is possibly “responsible” for naming the saint patron of Blanca, being the last waitress of the Virgin, by this line, Doña María de la Saletta Spuche de Lacy.

The current sculpture that we have is from Valencian José María Ponsoda y Bravo (Barcelona 1882 – Valencia 1963) for dressing. This sculptor was asked to create a sculpture by the Excmo. Sr. D.

Cayetano de Mergelina y Luna for Yecla in 1942, and causality is given that he had already done a couple of carvings of this dedication, one being acquired by the Portillo y Lorenzo family who brought it to Blanca to substitute the one officially burned in the plaza of the Church along with other images in 1936. However there is a local legend that a political authority took the head and hands of the Virgin and sold them to a British collector who paid their weight in gold. González Simancas said about her in 1905: *Dolorosa of the same kind as those from Salzillo and that by their beauty and character can very well be attributed. It's 1.65 meters high and only has the head and hands carved, by the way terribly executed.* The current sculpture doesn't have the hands in the style of the dolorosas murcianas inspired by the great sculpture Salzillo. Instead it has them crossed over the chest holding a heart, so it can very well be considered of the Solitude. It's in an altarpiece of ecliptic style with baroque reminiscence, of 6 x 3.4 meters, open to the navel of the Evangelio of the parish church of San John the Evangelist, done by the local artisan Antonio Soriano. The best part of the jewelry, crowns, robes... that the Brotherhood of Servitas de Nuestra Señora la Virgen de los Dolores possesses are kept thanks to Antonio Cano Cano, landlord of the Darrax farm, informed that they were going to look for everything of the Virgin (that was kept in that farm of which the waitress was the owner), made in a ribazo a big hole and in boxes to salt the ham, well cleaned, he placed everything, covered it and it spent the civil war there safe from looting. The novena in her honour, that is annually dedicated to her, ends on Good Friday.

It goes on procession with the Brotherhood of Our Lady of Sorrows, instituted canonically in 1919, every Holy Thursday at night and Good Friday in the morning and at night. It is done after finishing the procession and the place for that is the plaza of the Church with the lying Christ and with Saint John the Evangelist, a prayer of consecration of Blanca.

Mass huertana, generally in the afternoon, sings to her on the 15th of September, the day of her dedication, the Group of Chorus and Dances “*Virgen de los Dolores*” of Peña Huertana “La Capaza”.

On Good Friday 2 April 1993 the local mayor D. José Fernando Molina Molina was named Honorary Mayor of Blanca and given the Silver Medal of the Villa and the Baton of the Excmo. City council.

On 15 September 2011, the day of her onomastic, she was crowned by the general Vicar Monseñor Juan Tudela García.



Our Lady of Sorrows (Virgen de los Dolores)
Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos

CHAPTER 4

1989 Brotherhood of the Holy Souls of Blanca

The precise date of the foundation of this brotherhood is unknown to us. However, we have a written testimony in the testament of Anton Hernández (1680) offering two masses to the brotherhood of the souls¹¹.

The quadrille of the Holy Souls performs his traditional “Despedida”.

Like every January 6 the Brotherhood of the Holy Souls of Blanca celebrated one of the most deeply rooted traditions in our town - *Despedida de las Áimas* (Farewell to the spirits), which brings hundreds of faithful worshippers to the parish church of San Juan Evangelista to listen to the joyful songs which are to help invoke the Souls of Purgatory.



**The quadrille of the Holy Souls in the church
Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos**

¹¹ WESTERVELD, Govert (1997) Historia de Blanca (valle de ricote), lugar más islamizado de la región murciana. Años 711 – 1700, p. 845

The tradition of *Despedida de las Animas* has roots in the doctrine of the Purgatory, a place where the souls of the righteous who die stained by sin purify by expiating their faults before being admitted to Heaven. The Holy Souls are the souls of the dead waiting in Purgatory to redeem their sins to meet God.

The “Cuadrillas de Animas” (The quadrilles of the Souls) suggested to help the souls to get out of the Purgatory, and pray for them using the "songs animeras" - songs of four eight-syllable verses with a dissonant or consonant rhyme in the second and the fourth, with the first and third remaining free.



The quadrilles of the Souls with their “songs animeras”
Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos

In Blanca a quadrille led by a banner with the picture of the Virgen del Carmen, lawyer of the Purgatory, covers the streets of the town during the dates close to Christmas, singing and playing the songs animeras. The collected alms are used to help the seminar for masses for the dead and poor.



The quadrilles of the Souls with their “songs animeras”
Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos

“La Despedida de las Ánimas”, as it is known in Blanca, is held on every January 6. It starts by singing in the Chapel of La Milagrosa and then the streets near the church are crossed. Arriving at the church, at the foot of the Mayor Altar the quadrille begins the despedida, which is sung in two parts. The first part consists of the verses of the prayers that make the souls in Purgatory to be rescued and the second in which the saints are asked for ending the suffering of these souls. It ends by

playing some despedidas. After the act the *Health for the coming year* phrase is recited¹².



Holy Christ of Consolation (Photo: Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Antonio García Mengual, 1978

¹² MOLINA GALERA, José María & MOLINA PALAZON, Jesús Ricardo (2009). Historia de la Cofradía de las Benditas Ánimas. Blanca (Murcia).

CHAPTER 5

The Holy Week

Easter Festivities: As in other places in the region, when Lent comes, all the religious groups (cofradías) and brotherhoods to bring passion finalize preparations for the acts and parades full of fervor and passion.

Holy Week

"Holy and Great Week" is the week just before Easter. In the west, it is also the last week of Lent, and includes Palm Sunday, Holy Wednesday (Spy Wednesday), Maundy Thursday (Holy Thursday), Good Friday (Holy Friday), and Holy Saturday. It does not include Easter Sunday. So we have:

Palm Sunday

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem



Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, by Jean Léon Gérôme (1897)

Holy Monday

Anointing of Jesus in the home of Lazarus. Jesus expels the money changers from the Temple, accusing them of turning it into a den of thieves through their commercial activities.



Christ driving the Money Changers from the Temple, by El Greco (1570)

Holy Monday or Great and Holy Monday is the Monday of Holy Week, which is the week before Easter. Death and Resurrection of Jesus. It is the third day of Holy Week in Eastern Christianity, after Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday, and the second day of Holy Week in Western Christianity, after Palm Sunday.

Holy Tuesday

Jesus anticipates to his disciples the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter.



The Denial of Saint Peter by Gerard Seghers

Holy Tuesday or Great and Holy Tuesday is the Tuesday of Holy Week, which precedes the commemoration of the death of Jesus. On this day the Church commemorates the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), which forms one of the themes of the first three days of Holy Week, with its teaching about vigilance, and Christ as the Bridegroom. The bridal chamber is used as a symbol not only of the Tomb of Christ, but also of the blessed state of the saved on the Day of Judgement.

Holy Wednesday

Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles, secretly strikes a bargain with the Jewish elder, agreeing to betray Jesus to them for 30 silver coins.



Judas receiving thirty pieces of silver, by Mattia Preti, c. 1640

On the Wednesday before his death Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the Leper. As they sat at the supper table, a woman named Mary anointed Jesus' head and feet with costly oil of spikenard. The disciples were indignant, asking why the oil was not instead sold and the money given to the poor. But Judas Iscariot wanted to keep the money for himself. Then Judas went to the Sanhedrin and offered to deliver Jesus to them in exchange for money. From this moment on, Judas sought an opportunity to betray Jesus.

Holy Thursday

Jesus washes his disciples' feet. The Last Supper. Eucharist. Praying in the Garden, betrayal and arrest of Jesus.



The Last Supper, painting of the 16th century by Juan de Juanes

The feast of Maundy (or Holy) Thursday solemnly commemorates the institution of the Eucharist and is the oldest of the observances peculiar to Holy Week. Holy Thursday could not but be a day of liturgical reunion since, in the cycle of movable feasts, it brings around the anniversary of the institution of the Liturgy. On that day, whilst the preparation of candidates was being completed, the Church celebrated the *Missa chrismalis* and, moreover, proceeded to the reconciliation of penitents. Holy Thursday was taken up with a succession of ceremonies of a joyful character. the baptism of neophytes, the reconciliation of penitents, the consecration of the holy oils, the washing of the feet, and commemoration of the Blessed Eucharist.

Holy Friday

Prison of Christ. The interrogations by Caiaphas and Pilato. The flogging. The crown of thorns. Vía Crucis. Crucifixion and entombment of Jesus.



Christ before Caiaphas, by Matthias Stom (1640)

Good Friday, called *Feria VI in Parasceve* in the Roman Missal, *he hagia kai megale paraskeue* (the Holy and Great Friday) in the Greek Liturgy, *Holy Friday* in Romance Languages, *Charfreitag* (Sorrowful Friday) in German, is the English designation of Friday in Holy Week — that is, the Friday on which the Church keeps the anniversary of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday is a day of mourning. It is notable for the absence of official cults. The day is devoted to visiting the monuments and preparing the Easter Vigil.



Waiting for the Resurrection, by Tere Castañeda Rivera (CC BY-SA 3.0)

In the primitive Church Holy Saturday was known as Great, or Grand, Saturday, Holy Saturday, the Angelic Night, the Vigil of Easter, etc. It is no longer, like Maundy Thursday, a day of joy, but one of joy and sadness intermingled; it is the close of the season of Lent and penance, and the beginning of paschal time, which is one of rejoicing.

Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday, which immediately follows Holy Week and begins with the Easter Vigil, is the great feast day and apogee of the Christian liturgical year: on this day the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is celebrated¹³.



Resurrection of Christ, by Noel Coypel

¹³ Information of the Holy Week in: <http://www.newadvent.org>
New Advent. The Catholic Encyclopedia

The Ratchet

The photo here beneath is captioned as a ratchet used in Holy Week in Spain. It is placed in the bell tower of Blanca and could be heard over a great distance. The use of noise makers in some religions is widespread at certain times when the sound of bells is banned.



The Ratchet (Archive of Ángel Ríos)

During Holy Week, church bells have customarily been replaced by a wooden ratchet or noisemaker throughout the Christian world. Bells are not used. This is a centuries-old custom in all the Catholic churches of mourning for the suffering and death of Jesus Christ from the Gloria of the Mass of the Lord's Supper on the evening of Holy Thursday until the Gloria at the Easter Vigil. As a replacement pickguards, ratchets, rattle and similar wood tools are used to remind the faithful to prayer and worship times (Angelus, Liturgy of the Hours). The altar bells are replaced by those rattling.

Eight Brotherhoods in the Holy Week

At present there are eight religious groups in Blanca of which the oldest ones are:

- The Royal and Most Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Father Jesus of Nazareth
- The Brotherhood of St. John the Evangelist
- The Royal Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary
- The Brotherhood of Servitas of Our Lady of the Virgin of Sorrows

Other religious groups of a later date are:

- The Brotherhood of Veronica
- The Brotherhood of San Pedro
- The Brotherhood of St Mary Magdalene

and the younger Brotherhood:

- The Brotherhood of the Praying in the Garden

The Brotherhood of the Praying in the Garden carried the image of the Virgin of Sorrows to the Good Friday procession in 1986, three years later after the foundations of this brotherhood. This traditional Bid of Images that shows the emotion of Blanca's inhabitants to pay for carrying the chosen image on their shoulders is worth mentioning.



The traditional Bid of Images



The traditional Bid of Images



**The traditional Bid of Images
(Archive of Ángel Ríos)**

CHAPTER 6

The eight Brotherhoods in Blanca

1754 - The Royal and Most Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Father Jesus of Nazareth

The date of the founding *The Royal and Most Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Father Jesus of Nazareth* is unknown. The first documents that allude to the titular image are located in the *Book of the Brotherhood of the Holy Heart of Jesus of the Village of Blanca for the seat of the deceased brothers and sisters since the year 1754, devotion to Don Gines del Castillo C.* (Some death certificates specifically point to the chapels that serve as burial sites of the Parish San Juan Evangelista of Blanca.



**Our Father Jesus of Nazareth carrying the cross
Sculptor: José Sanchez Lozano, 1943**



Our Father Jesus of Nazareth carrying the cross
Sculptor: José Sanchez Lozano, 1943

So far no sources have been located about the authorship of the original image and the unknown sculptor who carried out the work. Much of the image unfortunately suffered from destruction of unknown cause; been grass fire in August of 1936, shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The current picture was made in 1943 by D. José Sánchez Lozano (1904-1995), a sculptor who after the death of Francisco Sánchez Araciel (who had followed the line of Salzillo) followed the aesthetic line of Salzillo, becoming his passionate follower since the mid 20s (S. XX). It was financed and donated to the Brotherhood by Don Pedro Pinar Multedo. The name *Royal and Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Father Jesus Nazarene* was given to the brotherhood by Don Ramon S. Bishop of Cartagena on 18 December 1950¹⁴.

¹⁴ For more study see: **MOLINA PALAZÓN, José María** (2002). Real e ilustre cofradía de nuestro padre Jesús Nazareno. En: Cofradías y Hermandades. Toda una Historia. Semana Santa 2002 Blanca. Editado por Cabildo de Cofradías y Hermandades de Semana Santa de Blanca, pp. 13-22.



Our Father Jesus of Nazareth (Archive of Ángel Ríos)
Sculptor: José Sanchez Lozano, 1943



Glorious Virgin (Archive of Ángel Ríos)
Sculptor: Carmen Carrillo, 1990



Jesus entered into Jerusalem
Talleres Dimosa de Olot (Gerona) del escultor Luis Sadurní Verdaguer, 1988



Holy Christ of Expiration
Sculptor: José Antonio Hernández Navarro



Glorious Virgin (Archive of Ángel Ríos)
Sculptor: Carmen Carrillo, 1990

1847 -The Brotherhood of St. John the Evangelist

The absence of any written reference about the founding date of this brotherhood is an important element of difficulty in telling its story. The earliest references establish its beginning around 1847, a date when a brotherhood with the titular name of the Parish church is remembered in the town.

The first recorded data correspond to 1942 when it was acquired for the parish, the titular image which presides over the presbytery. Although the image was not acquired as property of the brotherhood, it continued assuming the task of the procession through the streets of the town on the days of the Holy Week. The considerable weight of the image and the Christian one made the responsible persons of the brotherhood acquire a new image of Saint John, this now of his own property.

The sculptor chosen for this work was Tomas Pares of Madrid. The image came to our town on December 17 1950 and its modest cost was of 3.765 pesetas, an amount that may seem insignificant now. It would be in the passion week of the following year (1951) when this image would make a parade in our streets. This is the only image of the Brotherhood until 1986, when the current Board undertook the task of revitalizing the procession of Easter Sunday. The image of the Risen Christ, work of the now famous Murcian sculptor José Antonio Hernández Navarro, was then acquired loading the parades with the participation of the *San Juanistas* penitents and a new third with white robes that accompanies the image of the risen. This new image came to replace the previous Sacred Heart of Jesus, which until then had been taken to march on the morning of Easter Sunday.

In 1993 the brotherhood acquired new images. This is the case of Christ on Calvary, also by sculptor Hernández Navarro. This mystery is composed of three images; Our Lady of Sorrows, St. John, and Christ Crucified.



St. John the Evangelist (Archiv of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Tomas Pares, 1950

The impressive figure of crucified Christ stands out at the time of entrusting the custody of his mother to the beloved disciple, and so does the fact that during the days before the Holy Week of that year it was exposed in the cathedral church of our Diocese of Cartagena.

Feast of the Brotherhood

There are two especially important days in the civil calendar: September 14 as the Feast of the Cross is celebrated, and we do it with the participation of the Eucharist in the Chapel of the Miraculous where it is the image of Christ in the Calvary. The other major party is on December 27, Solemnity of the owner of our Brotherhood and head of the parish¹⁵.



St. John the Evangelist (Archiv of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Tomas Pares, 1950

¹⁵ For more study see: **MOLINA PALAZÓN, José María** (2002). Hermandad de San Juan Evangelista. En: Cofradías y Hermandades. Toda una Historia. Semana Santa 2002 Blanca. Editado por Cabildo de Cofradías y Hermandades de Semana Santa de Blanca, pp. 31-36.



Christ on Calvary (Archiv of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: José Antonio Hernandez Navarro, 1993



Christ on Calvary (Archiv of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: José Antonio Hernandez Navarro, 1993



The risen Christ (Archiv of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: José Antonio Hernandez Navarro, 1986

1849 - The Royal Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary

The Royal Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary was canonically erected in the Church of the Royal Monastery of the Visitation of Holy Mary of religious Salesas of Orihuela. In that congregation were admitted his brothers and all those enrolled in the parish of Blanca, thus being participants in all the indulgences designed by popes and other bishops of the church.

It was established in Blanca for the first time on February 18 1849 with D. Cayo Ortega as the parish priest who was eager to provide their parishioners all possible means for their spiritual health, and by hearing the opinions of some pious people conceived the thought of calling from the pulpit all who would attend that day to the sacristy of the parish church with the healthy objective to establish and formalize the Royal Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, which his predecessor José Berreyto had installed. This invitation corresponding to such healthy thoughts was accepted by many people in Blanca.

It's curious that a lot of information of this brotherhood is captured in the ancient Book of Acts from 1849 found in an abandoned house of an orchard in Blanca. In the book are described the ways in which executive charges, older brothers, and other members of the congregation were appointed as well as the accounts are collected each year and the list of brothers and sisters who were to accompany the images in the processions of Holy Week. The images of this brotherhood consist of *Lying Christ* by sculptor Mengual and a *Christ tied to the column*, a work by sculptor Francisco Sanchez Tapia who was a disciple of the school of Salzillo, 1898¹⁶.

¹⁶ For more study see: **MOLINA LAVEDA, Antonio A.** (2002). Real Congregación de los sagrados corazones de Jesús y María. En: Cofradías y Hermandades. Toda una Historia. Semana Santa 2002 Blanca. Editado por Cabildo de Cofradías y Hermandades de Semana Santa de Blanca, pp. 37-56.



Christ tied to the column
Sculptor: Francisco Sanchez Tapia, 1898



Lying Christ (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Pio Mollar and Antonio Garcia Mengual



Christ tied to the column (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Francisco Sanchez Tapia, 1898

1919 The Brotherhood of Servitas of Our Lady of the Virgin of Sorrows

The Brotherhood of Servitas of Our Lady of the Virgin of Sorrows was established canonically in the parish of San Juan Evangelista of Blanca on April 12 1919. Its first statutes are from the same date and were decreed and signed by the Bishop of Cartagena.

There is no documentation to tell us since when she was the patron of Blanca, but we found the first reference of her in Book IV about deaths of the Parochial File in the departure of Maria Concepcion Molina, widow of D. Antonio Portillo, who died on 9 October 1821, shrouded in the habit of San Francisco, buried in the vault of Our Lady of Sorrows.

The first image was destroyed during the civil war. In 1905 Gonzalez Simancas observed the following about the image: *Painful like the types of Salzillo, its beauty and naturalistic character could be attributed to him. It is 1.65m tall and has just the head and hands carved, the latter certainly very poorly executed.*

The current image of Our Lady of Sorrows is by Valencian sculptor José María Ponsoda and Bravo, beautiful work, slightly smaller than the one burned in the civil war of 1936-39. This sculptor was commissioned the work of the Excellency Mr. Don Cayetano Mergelina y Luna for Yecla in 1942, and he happened to perform two works of this title, one having been acquired by the family Portillo and Lorenzo, which they brought to Blanca. This replaces the one destroyed during the civil war. Currently the Brotherhood has about 400 members of which 150 participate in processional parades¹⁷.

¹⁷ For more study see: **RÍOS MARTÍNEZ, Ángel** (2002). Cofradía de Servitas de nuestra señora la Virgen de los Dolores. En: Cofradías y Hermandades. Toda una Historia. Semana Santa 2002 Blanca. Editado por Cabildo de Cofradías y Hermandades de Semana Santa de Blanca, pp. 23-30.



Holy Virgin of Sorrows (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Jose Maria Ponsoda y Bravo, 1942

1952 - The Brotherhood of Veronica

We owe the description of this brotherhood to the older brother Rafael Martínez García and here offer the summary of facts. The group of four images corresponds to *The passage of Jesus and Veronica* to this brotherhood in 1952. These four pictures came from the workshops of Olot and cost 15,486 pesetas. Since 1975 the brotherhood has another image: *Veronica*. In 1986 a contract was made with sculptor Jose Hernandez of Los Ramos to obtain the image of the Christ of the Great Power, of which the cost amounted to 300,000 pesetas. In 1990 the same sculptor created the image of the *Virgin of Encounter* for 450,000 pesetas¹⁸.



La Veronica (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Talleres de Arte cristiano de Olot (Gerona), 1944

¹⁸ For more study see: MARTÍNEZ GARCÍA, Rafael (2002). Cofradía de la Verónica. En: Cofradías y Hermandades. Toda una Historia. Semana Santa 2002 Blanca. Editado por Cabildo de Cofradías y Hermandades de Semana Santa de Blanca, pp. 57-67.



The passage of Jesus and Veronica (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptors of the four images: Los Talleres de Arte Cristiano de Olot (Gerona)
Hernandez Navarro, 1987



The passage of Jesus and Veronica (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptors of the four images: Los Talleres de Arte Cristiano de Olot (Gerona)
Hernandez Navarro, 1987



The passage of Jesus and Veronica (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptors of the four images: Los Talleres de Arte Cristiano de Olot (Gerona)
Hernandez Navarro, 1987



La Verónica
Sculptor: Talleres de Arte cristiano de Olot (Gerona), 1994

1980 - The Brotherhood of Apostle San Pedro

The brief history of the Brotherhood of San Pedro started in 1980. A group of residents of Alto del Paloma proposed a party in the neighbourhood, where a Mass was presided by an image of San Pedro. Later it was proposed to build a chapel in the area.

On June 28 1981 the image of San Pedro was taken to Alto del Paloma to the door of the parish of Blanca where it was blessed. This image was made in the Christian Art workshops of Olot (Gerona).

In October 1999 the Brotherhood commissioned sculptor Antonio Garcia Mengual, from Espinardo (Murcia). A new image of San Pedro dressed, blessed on April 15 2000 and has been taken to Easter procession since that year.

Every year the neighbourhood of Alto del Paloma celebrates a festival on June 29 in honour of San Pedro, doing processions through the streets of the neighbourhood with the image of San Pedro that heads the chapel¹⁹.

¹⁹ For more study see: **EGEA LOBA, Emilio** (2002). Hermandad de San Pedro. En: Cofradías y Hermandades. Toda una Historia. Semana Santa 2002 Blanca. Editado por Cabildo de Cofradías y Hermandades de Semana Santa de Blanca, pp. 69-72.



San Pedro (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Antonio García Mengual 2000



San Pedro (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Antonio García Mengual, 2000



San Pedro (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Antonio García Mengual, 2000

1981 The Brotherhood of St Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene is mentioned both in the canonical New Testament and several apocryphal gospels as a distinguished disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.. She is considered a saint by the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and the Anglican communion. She is particularly important for agnostic trends of Christianity.

The image of St. Mary Magdalene was commissioned to sculptor Don Antonio Garcia Mengual from Espinardo who has also created the two images of Christ of the Souls and the current St. Peter that parade in the Holy Week procession in Blanca.

On November 11 1981 the image came to Blanca and made a parade for the first time on the night of Holy Thursday of 1982 with the Brotherhood of St. John the Evangelist, on a throne provided by the nearby town of Abarán which was acquired for the following processions.

Currently the Brotherhood comprises 160 brethren of which 24 are part of the body of pallbearers of St. Mary Magdalene and about 30 children and adults accompany the image as penitents in the processions²⁰.

²⁰ For more study see: **UNKNOWN AUTHOR** (2002). Cofradía de santa María Magdalena. En: Cofradías y Hermandades. Toda una Historia. Semana Santa 2002 Blanca. Editado por Cabildo de Cofradías y Hermandades de Semana Santa de Blanca, pp. 77-82.



St. Mary Magdalene (Archiv of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Antonio García Mengual, 1981



St. Mary Magdalene (Archiv of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Antonio García Mengual, 1981



Jesus of Love and Charity, stripped of his garments
Sculptor: Yuste Navarro, 2015



Jesus of Love and Charity, stripped of his garments
Sculptor: Yuste Navarro, 2015

1989 - The Brotherhood of the Praying in the Garden

In 1986 a group of friends for the first time unveiled the image of *Our Lady of Sorrows of Angustias of Good Friday* by sculptor Tomás Parés (1951), in the morning. In 1987 after the processions the image was restored from formidable deterioration and the image of *The Praying Christ* was ordered, and created in the Holy Week of 1988. All this led to the establishment of the *Brotherhood of Praying in the Garden* in 1989. After the meeting an angel was approved to be made for Easter 1990 to accompany Christ and at the same time serve to come out for Resurrection Sunday. After the Holy Week of 1990 it was decided that they would order the image of *Ecco Hommo* for release in the morning of Good Friday of 1991²¹.



Ecc Homo (Archive of Angel Ríos)
Sculptor: Talleres de Arte Cristiano de Olot (Gerona),

²¹ For more study see: UNKNOWN AUTHOR (2002). Hermandad de la oración en el huerto. En: Cofradías y Hermandades. Toda una Historia. Semana Santa 2002 Blanca. Editado por Cabildo de Cofradías y Hermandades de Semana Santa de Blanca, pp. 73-76.



Our Lady of Sorrows of Angustias (Archive of Angel Rios)
Sculptor: Tomas Pares, 1951



Praying in the Garden (Archiv of Angel Rios)

The kneeling Christ – Sculptor: Carmen Carrillo, 1988 and 2006

Angel – Sculptor: Talleres de Artes Cristiano de Olot (Gerona)



Praying in the Garden (Archiv of Angel Rios)

The kneeling Christ – Sculptor: Carmen Carrillo, 1988 and 2006

Angel – Sculptor: Talleres de Artes Cristiano de Olot (Gerona)



Triumphant Angel (Archiv of Angel Rios)
Sculptor: Carmen Carrillo, 2006



**Triumphant Angel (Archiv of Angel Rios)
Sculptor: Jose Maria Molina Palazon, 2011**



Meeting of Jesus and Mary in the street of bitterness (Archiv of Angel Rios)
Sculptor: Hernandez Navarro, 1987



Meeting of Jesus and Mary in the street of bitterness
Sculptor: Hernandez Navarro, 1987



Meeting of Jesus and Mary in the street of bitterness
Sculptor: Hernandez Navarro, 1987



Meeting of Jesus and Mary in the street of bitterness
Sculptor: Hernandez Navarro, 1987

CHAPTER 7

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**We recommend the sculptures of the carver
José María Molina Palazón:**

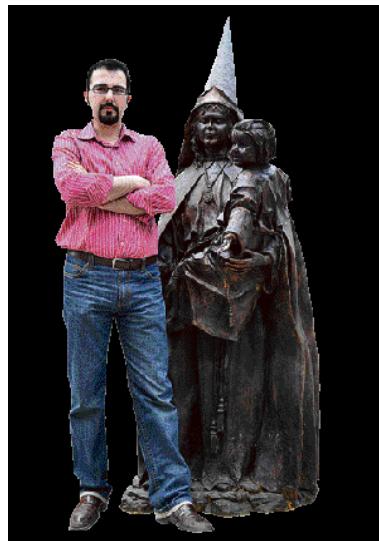


Photo: José A. Moreno²²

More information in:

<http://www.molinapalazon.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tq0Bz6FQQcU>

<http://www.laverdad.es/murcia/v/20140214/region/asistimos-region-despertar-escultura-20140214.html>

²² Kindness of the newspaper *La Verdad* of Murcia.

